In Conversation with Robert Miller

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The end of the Cold War was to usher in a new era of international peace and security. Instead, new types of conflicts have emerged and the international community has had to react quickly. New threats to peace have been countered with varying doses of peacemaking, peacekeeping, and, today, peacebuilding. This newest approach — peacebuilding — recognizes that the sources of violent conflict are complex and that human security and international stability will only be achieved by integrating political, military, and development efforts.

The late Gregory Wirick and Robert Miller are the co-editors of *Canada and Missions for Peace: Lessons from Nicaragua, Cambodia and Somalia*. In an interview with **Reports**, Robert Miller reflects on the changing landscape of peace, conflict and development, including:

How did *Canada and Missions for Peace* come about?

It really originated as a conversation between my late friend and colleague Greg Wirick and I about six or seven years ago as we reflected on the changes emerging from the end of the Cold War. We were excited by *Agenda for Peace*, and yet we had some reservations about it. ...We wanted to reflect on some of the lessons that had been emerging from that discussion. The second objective was to reflect on the Canadian experience, to see whether lessons could be drawn and then to pull them together in a single place.

In his paper *Agenda for Peace*, former UN Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali talked about four concepts related to peace. Could you elaborate on those?

"Preventive diplomacy" attemps to focus attention on the need to avoid conflict in the first place. Once the dynamic of conflict begins, it’s extremely difficult to stop. "Peacebuilding," like preventive diplomacy, focuses on the underlying forces that contribute to conflict. "Peacekeeping" took what we’d learned about development and allied it with preventing conflict, or restoring peace after conflict. "Peacemaking" has been perhaps the most ambiguous of the terms. In the UN vocabulary, it means the more aggressive use of international force to end conflict. Obviously, these aren’t pure types. In every situation you see some merging and blurring. While Agenda for Peace introduced a new vocabulary, it did so in rather traditional ways. It very much focused on the role of the state and international diplomacy without taking into account the role of NGOs (non-governmental organizations) and so on.

Speaking of new vocabulary, the very title of your book, *Missions for Peace*, is a phrase that you're coining to create distance from the notion of "Peace missions."

Many of the missions, and specifically the ones in this book — Nicaragua, Somalia and Cambodia — involve a mixture of the various elements of peace intervention that the Secretary- General talked about in his study. We felt we needed some kind of generic term to capture this fact. Second, there was under this whole movement a bit of a missionary complex, the notion that the international community, and particularly the West, could bring to the business of peace the same kind of fervour that was once attached to development. While respecting the idealism that lies under that, there's also a cautionary note in our study. As we've seen, time and time again, the international community can't make peace. In the end, it depends very much on the forces on the ground, the society, the politics, and the culture.

As you said, one of the limitations that's been pointed out in *Agenda for Peace* is the reliance on the state. There is almost a suspicion about NGOs.

I think the UN has come a long way. The collaboration between NGOs and the UN has grown, but we still have a legacy that the real actors in the global community are nation states. We see on the economic side that corporations and financial markets are powerful actors that sometimes overwhelm the power of states. I think we're also seeing, in the area of conflict and development, that an emerging, global civil society is beginning to appear. NGOs with alliances around the world have to become a tremendously valuable resource to address these issues. Agenda for Peace did not go far enough in recognizing those changes and the need to incorporate civil society in solutions.

That was one of the conclusions of the Somalia chapter — the need to involve not just NGOs from the North, but also indigenous groups as well.

Exactly.

What role should each play? Is it as simple as saying the state should be involved in peacekeeping, and the peacebuilding and development should be left for the NGOs?

No, I don't think the division is functional. Even in peacekeeping, NGOs can be extremely useful as bridge builders between hostile communities. I don't think there's a simple formula for saying "You belong here" and "You belong there."

One of the most interesting sections in terms of Canada's role was the Cambodia chapter. It looks at Canada's support for UN principles in this conflict, but also at Canada's economic interests.

I think Cambodia illustrates that Canada has not always been the "boy scout". Our interests in playing a role in the Paris Peace Accords had a lot to do with our desire to be an actor in that part of the world, and to open channels of communication in Asia. This is one instance where our economic and trade interests drew us into playing a constructive role beyond what we might otherwise have done.

In the last chapter, which is called "Linking peace and development," you cautioned against too much reliance on the UN, the need for selective engagement, and the need for modest expectations in deactivating conflict. You are concerned that the Canadian government seems to be locked into a "fast entry-fast exit"approach. In this context, you discuss how the peacekeeping vocabulary uses metaphors drawn from engineering and architecture, as if

forces are going to come in and change the landscape. You propose another kind of language.

This is another contribution from Greg Wirick who reflected on these things for a long time. Mechanistic language like "peacekeeping machinery" implies a kind of cause and effect relationship, which experience has shown doesn't exist. Some people have said conflicts are more like the weather than a bulldozer. They emerge out of a myriad of forces. We think a biological or environmental metaphor is more appropriate: one that captures first of all that seeds planted have to take root locally within the context of a society to be sustainable. If we enter these situations with the notion that we're going to "fix" it, more often than not, we'll be disappointed.

How do you see the book being used?

I hope it contributes to the growing conversation within Canada and around the world about these issues. I think what's happening in, for example, the global economic crisis brings home to us the underlying point of the book which is the interconnectedness of things. We've had, "It's economics, stupid." We've had earlier periods when development was "growth" but not other things. I think over the last 25 years we've seen how these elements are all interconnected. Therefore, we need to think about things in a different way.

Gregory Wirick (1956-1998) was an Associate with the Parliamentary Centre and Senior Advisor to the Canadian Committee for the Fiftieth Anniversary of the United Nations. Representing the Parliamentary Centre, Mr. Wirick acted as Principal Advisor to the Senate Subcommittee on Security and National Defence (1993) and the Special Senate Committee on National Defence (1989). Robert Miller is Director of the Parliamentary Centre in Ottawa. His extensive experience in public policy includes parliamentary-strengthening programs abroad and foreign policy reviews in southern Africa and Southeast Asia.

The Book

- Canada and Missions for Peace: Lessons from Nicaragua, Cambodia and Somalia

  Gregory Wirick and Robert Miller, eds., IDRC 1998